

Mind-Body Performance: Get With The Flow!

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Whether you are walking, playing tennis or team sports, applying the capabilities of your mind to your physical movements adds amazing force and focus to your efforts.

Mind-Body Techniques

Some of the most common mind-body techniques taught by sport psychologists, coaches and teachers include mental rehearsal, cross training your brain and body, visualization, imagery, and goal oriented affirmations.

Mental Rehearsal

Researchers have found that rehearsing a physical activity in your mind, step-by-step, in the sequence that you would perform it causes muscular, tissue and supporting structure responses that can be measured. Learning the proper technique and movements, then rehearsing them in your mind will help your body to learn the movements and perform at a higher level once you actually begin to engage in the activity. Visual aids are very helpful in imprinting the correct sequence of movements into your memory. Once you have learned the correct moves, mentally rehearse the activity movement by movement until it is clear and familiar to you.



Cross Training Your Brain and Body

People who work in logical, left-brained jobs are advised by sports psychologists to balance their mental activity with right-brained physical workouts. Right-brained exercise is playful, unstructured, and expressive. Examples are tai chi, yoga, dance, and gymnastics. On the other hand, people who work primarily using their right brain in creative and process-oriented careers should engage more in left-brain physical activities. Structured, logical, and routine-based workouts will give you mental balance. Examples are repetition based activities such as weights, doing intervals and following a goal oriented fitness regime.

The central principle of sports psychology is the application of mental techniques coupled with physical activity principles. Mental visual pictures of how the body optimally moves and reacts to certain movement activities can enhance your performance as you engage in your favorite sports or exercise regime.

Visualization

One of the most powerful ways to use visualization for fitness is to mentally see the muscles and body involved in the activity you are engaging in. This means you need to learn and visualize the inner workings of your body in your mind's eye. Learn the basic bone, muscle, tissue, ligament and organ layout in your body then focus your mind on the body parts being used within each movement as you do it. See your muscle fibers contract and extend, filling with oxygenated blood and becoming stronger and denser. See your abdominal muscles tightening and building to work with your back muscles, creating a strong central sheath of support for your inner torso organs. And so on.

Imagery

Martial artists have used imagery for centuries to create amazing routines that resemble the movements of particular animals. Sequences based on the natural gestures of the cat, monkey, tiger, dragon and other animals are still taught in dojos around the globe. This mental technique can be used in any activity to help you stimulate a natural, instinctual level of motion as you work out. Some experts suggest that you mentally imagine that you are like a natural element, such as freely moving water or strong and resilient metal. Metaphoric resonance can help you to effectively move your body in similar ways to the animal, element or other object that you imagine yourself being.



Goal Oriented Affirmations

Affirmations are inner messages which you can give yourself by incorporating them into your routine mental "self-talk". We all mentally talk to ourselves. By willfully using positive and affirming mental statements during your workouts, you can help increase your energy and motivation for doing fitness activities. As well, this reinforces the mental images used while combining fitness with visualization, imagery and mental rehearsal. The most effective affirmations are ones that you choose yourself, tailored to reflect your own unique preferences and activity choices. Examples include, "My body is strong and limber, it loves to run and throw the ball"; "My body is free and nimble"; "I can jump effortlessly and lightly, easily clearing the bar."

Resources

[Why Mental Training?](#) An article by sports psychologist, Karlene Sugarman offers more information on mind-body training.

[Mind Tools: Introduction to Imagery and Simulation](#) offers an overview of how to use imagery in your fitness regime.